1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

831 522 the impression that they had been caught out in a breach of formal manners to which sensible people did not pay any attention.

834 522 Young unmarried girls did not on the whole join in these jokes, though they might laugh at them; boys started making them at about the age of fourteen. Girls and young women were very careful about exposing their bodies and often a great deal of fuss went on if a father or husband brought up a girl to have sores on her leg dressed; I think some of the women did feel genuinely distressed at having a stranger touch their legs before witnesses. Grown men were also fairly modest before me, but the younger men and boys were not; if they had torn pants or no pants, and thereby exposed themselves, this was a cause for laughter rather than confusion. On occasion, especially when we first arrived, women would reproach young children for showing their nakedness; this was always done very quietly and in a calm voice without emotion; the warning was often observed for quite two minutes after the woman had spoken. Excessive modesty of speech or action is a great part of the pattern of respectful behaviour, and is enjoined towards parents-in-law and social superiors; except in these situations it is considered a juvenile trait which people grow out of; it is usually given as the chief reason for the difficulty of establishing the marriage of young people on a firm basis. It is a legitimate subject for teasing; and one of the permanent jokes of the younger men was to push the more modest women into my arms, or to tell them that if they wanted really good medicine they should come and visit me late in the evening. A few of the girls seemed really distressed at this behaviour and all attempted to appear bashful; but with many the pretence was not successful.

iv

191 ● 537 Speech has very great importance for the Lepchas. Indeed, apart from such knowledge as is necessary for the priests of the different religions, it may be said to represent their art, their science, and their intellectual entertainment. To be able to speak well is after being able to work well the highest social commendation. A good speaker is always in demand, and is essential on formal occasions, such as the entertainment of a stranger, or as *bek-bu* in marriage transactions.

195 537 There are two kinds of excellency in speech; first there is the person with an elegant vocabulary, and second the person with a

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

[537] large repertoire of stories. In Lepcha speech there are two kinds of variation to the everyday vocabulary for added richness and elegance; there is the honorific vocabulary, and allusive periphrasis, or *tang-bor*. The honorific vocabulary consists, I am informed, entirely of loan words from Tibetan or Sikkimese; it is meant always to be used to social superiors, but in Zongu only a few of these honorific words are current, and then only in connection with religion. The honorific terms for the parts of the body are used in describing supernaturals, and the honorific terms for 'presents' and 'to offer' are used for religious gifts and sacrifices. Those who can manage this honorific vocabulary would use it in talking to representatives of the State.

The *tang-bor* on the other hand are used a great deal. The nearest parallel to a *tang-bor* is an analogy or comparison which is used in the place of the idea which is intended to be conveyed. To give a somewhat over-simplified illustration, it is as though an Englishman were to say 'I am a horse' or 'I am a lord', instead of 'I am as hungry as a horse' 'I am as drunk as a lord'. A great number of these *tang-bor* are traditional; a good speaker however will make up his own. Quite a number are now incomprehensible, either because the references are forgotten, because they retain archaic terms, or because they have been borrowed from another district. A great number of the allusions are local, and a stranger will often be unable to understand the local *tang-bor*. Some are used for toning down disagreeable or shocking expressions, such as 'he has closed his eyes' for 'he is dead', 'the maize harvest is ripe' for 'has a sexual erection'. Others are humorous: a monkey is called 'pretty-face', a he-goat 'daddy-talk-too-much'; Lepchas are referred to as 'the drinkers', Nepali as 'the contradictory ones'. Others again are descriptive; the bear is 'he who leans forward', the fish 'he who throws away water', stolen goods 'prison come after'. *Tang-bor* can be used as a secret language, but it is chiefly employed for elegance and humour. In stories, especially the semi-historical stories, the principal characters always speak to one another in *tang-bor*.

[198]

537 [517] Story-telling is the major Lepcha art and distraction. The favourite of all situations for story-telling is round the fire after work in the evenings; on these occasions the long stories will be told, stories which may take five or six evenings in their telling, one person doing the talking and the others listening. But this is not the only time when stories are told; in long tedious work, such as

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

●537 weeding, one person will tell (usually short) stories while the others work; sometimes there is one person appointed as story-teller for the day; that person will get special tit-bits at the evening meal. Only short stories are told at feasts, because there is too much noise and distraction for the necessary prolonged attention. Stories are also told on completely unformalised occasions; the sight of an uncommon bird or insect usually calls forth from somebody the story connected with this animal.

Lepcha stories are characterised by their vividness and by the number of internal repetitions. The Lepchas visualise extremely precisely and concretely; there are no half-tones in their stories; a thing or a person either is or is not present, and no attempt is made to fill the gap with guesses or conjectures. Although their stories are told extremely vividly, there is little tendency towards dramatisation for its own sake; changing of voice and mimicry of characters only occur in the humorous tales. Apart from the two sacred Mun stories there is no insistence on verbatim accuracy, provided all the points of the story are remembered.

Most of the older people have one or two long stories which are, as it were, their speciality; but there is no feeling of ownership in them and if another person can remember them he is at liberty to tell them. It is considered that to be able to recount a long story accurately it is necessary to listen to it attentively three times. Except for one or two of the animal fables the stories are never told to children; when they begin to learn sense and can sit quietly —that is when they are about ten—they are allowed to listen provided they don't interrupt. Some of the young boys know one or two short stories, and were very pleased to tell them to me, as unmarried youths do not easily get an audience.

It is not considered permissible to invent new fables or *lung-then* as they have a semi-scriptural value; the most that is allowed is a little individual embroidery or emphasis. Indeed I question whether stories are ever consciously invented; new ones are added to the repertoire through guests or visiting strangers.

Besides stories Lepchas are very fond of recounting anecdotes and events of their own past life or of their neighbours'; some of these anecdotes, such as the ordeal of the poisoners at Lungdeum[4] are half-way towards turning into stories, since they are told by people who were not themselves present. These anecdotes are told extremely precisely and concretely; when Lepchas describe

[4] See Book Three, Chapter Fifteen, pp. 392–393.

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

a scene from their own past they describe it minutely and statically, as though they were looking at a picture. They frequently like to make their descriptions clearer by employing twigs or pebbles to represent the people and things described.

It is probable that the value which is placed on story-telling has greatly influenced the Lepcha tendency to monologue, to talk as it were in paragraphs, to which I have already referred; this tendency is noticeable even in the speeches put into the mouths of the characters of their stories. Stichomythia is only applied to jokes.

V

Besides being the greatest social diversion, speech is also the greatest social sanction. For through speech is produced the strongest unpleasant psychological sensation that the Lepchas recognise—shame; and shame is on occasion so unbearable that it leads to suicide.

The training and education of Lepchas from their earliest childhood stresses social approval and disapproval as the motive for adopting or abstaining from certain types of behaviour. A child is told that if he does certain acts—takes other people's property for example, or refuses to work—other people won't like him and won't help him. The emphasis is always on the disapproval of the community in general and not, as with us, on the losing the love of the parents, or the gods, or on the punishment by people in authority. It would seem (though without further evidence this is only a speculation) that this emphasis on anonymous social approval together with the fact that the extended family is a psychologically operative group, and that positive training takes place relatively late in the life of the child, has the result of producing a much weaker internalised control (or super-ego) than is the case when the approving and punishing mechanism is introjected in the image of the parents and parent-surrogates. It is also noteworthy that the Lepcha social organisation only renders possible identification with the community as a whole, and, though to a lesser extent, with the extended family; the Lepchas have not, as most European children and adults have, smaller groups in the community with whom they can identify, and whose approval will support them against the condemnation of another part of the community.

If this is an accurate representation of the case it would follow